

April 1, 2020

The Platte Lake Improvement Association has very effectively dealt with threats to the waters of our lakes. The forest surrounding our lakes is also under threat. Much of that threat is caused by human beings and is easily preventable.

**Oak Wilt** is a fungal disease that very quickly kills the oaks, particularly red oak trees that are very common around the Platte Lakes. It is transmitted to an uninfected area by sap-feeding beetles, particularly between April 1 and July 15. The beetles are attracted to the sap produced by tree wounds that can be caused by nature, pruning, or tree cutting. Once infected, a red oak is doomed. The fungus crystallizes the vasculature of the tree, quickly starving it of nutrients. The leaves will quickly turn brown and the tree will die within two months.

The death of the tree does not end the threat to the forest. Oak trees form root grafts with other trees, providing an avenue for the fungus to spread from oak to oak. Thus, once the disease is present in an area you can expect widespread loss of oak trees.

Once oak wilt is present, control is extremely difficult and expensive. There is no cure for an infected tree. Unaffected trees can be inoculated over a period of several years, at significant cost, with no guarantee of a good outcome. Root grafts between stands of trees can be cut with deep, vibrating plows. Again, this is expensive and provides no guarantee of success. ***The best strategy is to learn about the disease and adjust our practices to prevent its introduction into our area.***

These are the most effective strategies to keep our oak forest healthy:

- Avoid trimming or removing oaks between April 1 and July 15. This is the period of highest danger of introduction into an uninfected area. If you must prune, treat the wounds with a latex paint.
- Deal only with reputable tree removal companies. Ask about oak wilt. Ethical companies will agree to cut your tree during periods of reduced threat. Unethical companies will cut anytime.

As you stand on your property this spring, look around and try to imagine what your forest would look like without the red oaks. Imagine the impact on your property values. Spread the word through the neighborhood. Your work on oaks raises the threat to those of your neighbors. Your neighbor's actions will put your property at risk.

Thank you for your help in protecting our oak forest.

Mark Esper, Member

PLIA